

David Watson Terror Australis

Gallery Barry Keldoulis
25 March - 25 April 2004

GBK presents a timely exhibition of new photographic work by Sydney artist David Watson.

In upending photographic and landscape traditions, Watson's images are seductive and unsettling. Though resonant with essences of Australian colour, place and memory, his photographs are intentionally timeless, unplaceable, ambiguous. Red skies and warnings are no longer the preserve of shepherds...

Watson's images speak of now, and something is awry. 'There is a chill in the emotional heart of this country. Many of us seem disconnected from what is precious, what lies beneath our feet. Exhausted by consumerism and stifled by cynicism, we've become suspicious and fearful', he says.

Artifice abounds. His deeply hued iconic Australian 'horizons' are actually slide-roll ends (accidental abstract vistas 'shot' while loading his camera on cycling trips around Europe, dutifully processed by Kodak's Berkhamsted laboratory) which he hoarded while living in London during the 1980s 'because their intense form and colour reminded me of the land I often missed'.

Counterpointing these 'labsapes' is a delicate suite of veiled landscape ellipses - 'glimpses of wonder' Watson calls them. Denying focus, the images float, oscillate - dreamscapes which strive to awaken shared memory.

Watson is curious to know whether the connections he himself feels with this ancient new place Australia (thanks to a lifetime combing its wilds and municipal margins birdwatching, bushwalking, camping and surfing) are indeed shared. His fear is that curiosity, poetry and wonder are fast evaporating in a mean-spirited unapologetic Australia.

From a corner of the gallery another alarmed custodian - a porcelain koala holding a candle - bears witness to **Terror Australis**.

Watson's layered and thoughtful work offers something of an antidote.

Exhibition opening 5.30-8pm Thursday 25 March 2004

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Thurs Fri Sat Sun 12 - 6 and by appointment